



BECOMING UTAH: A PEOPLES' JOURNEY

A Guide for Educators with Supplemental Resources

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OVERVIEW:

On January 4, 1896, after a forty-eight-year struggle, Utah became the 45th state to enter the Union. Utah's path to statehood was complicated and often controversial, which makes its journey an important American story. Utah's leaders applied for statehood seven times—and failed six times—over five decades. To achieve the political status of statehood, Utahns had to confront weighty cultural, political, and social issues and overcome differences among the state's diverse communities.

While statehood marks an important moment, it is Utah's people who have defined this place. Long before 1896, diverse peoples shaped what the state became by working to build its towns, industries, economies, and communities. Not all Utahns were represented politically before, or after, 1896. However, Utah's people worked toward equality and legal representation. Utah's journey to statehood and beyond shows how many groups contributed to building Utah, and also how they raised their voices to secure political, legal, religious, social, and cultural rights.

CONNECTIONS TO STATE STANDARDS:

4th Grade Social Studies Standards

Standard 2 - Objective 2 - Describe ways that Utah has changed over time.

- a. Identify key events and trends in Utah history and their significance (e.g. American Indian settlement, European exploration, Mormon settlement, westward expansion, American Indian relocation, statehood, development of industry, World War I and II).
- b. Compare the experiences faced by today's immigrants with those faced by immigrants in Utah's history.

Standard 3 - Objective - Analyze the different ways people have organized governments in Utah to meet community needs.

- a. Identify the forms of government found in Utah in different eras (i.e. historic and current American Indian government, State of Deseret, Utah Territory, statehood era, present).
- b. Compare how these governments addressed community needs.
- c. Compare the roles and responsibilities of state, county, and local officials.

7th Grade Utah Studies Core Standards

UT Standard 2.7: Students will identify the political challenges that delayed Utah's statehood and explain how these challenges were overcome. (civics)

UT Standard 2.8: Students will explain how their own connection to Utah is a reflection of the complex history of the state. (history)

VIDEO VIEWING GUIDE - TOPICS COVERED:

- Utah's Native Peoples
 - Spanish Explorers
 - Nineteenth-Century Immigration
 - The State of Deseret
 - Mormons as "Un-American"
 - Polygamy
 - Theocracy
 - Isaac Trumbo
 - Women's Advocacy
 - Women's Suffrage
 - Citizenship
 - Native American Voting Rights
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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR EDUCATORS:

- Nineteenth-Century Immigration
- Barriers to Statehood
- Utah Women’s Fight for Political Rights
- Utah’s Constitution: A Victory for Some but Not All
- Native American Sovereignty

LESSON PLANS:

- Immigrants from All Over the World (elementary, secondary)
- Polygamy and Political Cartoons (secondary)
- Native American Sovereignty (elementary, secondary)

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- How did Utah’s diverse peoples help Utah become a state?
- Why did Utah struggle to achieve statehood?
- How did improved transportation, industry, and mining transform Utah’s economy, politics, and other aspects of culture?
- How does the history of Utah’s diverse peoples connect with you today?
- How does Utah’s past shape our shared future?



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR EDUCATORS

NINETEENTH-CENTURY IMMIGRATION

Native American communities have been present in the Great Basin for more than 12,000 years. Over thousands of years, Native peoples developed scientific knowledge of the climate, environment, and topography of Utah, established long-distance trade routes, and engaged in diplomacy, peace, and conflict with neighboring tribes. By the 1700s five distinct cultural groups, each with their own language, lifeways, and cultures, had their homelands in the region that became Utah: the Goshute, Paiute, Shoshone, Ute, and Navajo peoples.

The first European forays into Utah began with the Dominguez-Escalante Expedition in 1776, and intercultural trade developed in the early nineteenth century. In southern and eastern Utah, the Old Spanish Trail carried woolen goods from Santa Fe to California, alongside a violent trade in horses and Indigenous slaves. In the north, Euro-American trappers and traders developed a trading economy with Shoshone and Ute people. During the second half of the nineteenth century, however, this trickle of newcomers became a flood of immigrants, who came to Utah from all over the world.

In 1847, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints fled the United States into Mexican territory hoping to practice their religion in peace. However, shortly after their arrival in northern Utah, the United States declared war on Mexico to expand its territory to the Pacific Ocean. In 1848, the Mexican-American War ended, and Mexico surrendered much of the American southwest to American hands, including Utah. Over the coming decades, Mormon settlers poured into Salt Lake City and extended their settlements throughout the American West.

Before the 1870s, immigrants arrived on foot, by wagon, or stagecoach—an arduous journey that took weeks or months to complete. After the transcontinental railroad was finished in 1869, travel became cheaper and faster, and the railroads carried in thousands of immigrants from all over the world. These people transformed Utah with new cities, towns, farms, ranches, mines, and industries. They brought with them diverse languages, foods, religious practices, and customs that redefined Utah’s cultural, political, religious, and economic landscape.

This global migration to Utah increased steadily and peaked during the 1920s. Utah’s immigrant settlers made Utah their home in a number of ways. Many worked in the territory’s mining and railroad industries, opening businesses, purchasing or renting homes, and buying goods from local merchants and companies. Mormon immigrants—including thousands from northern Europe, as well as a small but notable group of Polynesians—typically established agricultural communities and raised crops and livestock to contribute to Utah’s growing economy.

Latino people from the American Southwest and from Mexico lived and worked in Utah as well. Latinos/as not only opened businesses; they also worked in mines, on farms, for the railroads, and in shops.

The Central Pacific Railroad recruited thousands of Chinese immigrants to build the transcontinental railroad. They continued to live and work in Utah Territory, even after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 severely limited immigration from China. The act also made Chinese immigrants ineligible for naturalization. Many Chinese immigrants worked for railroad and mining companies, while others opened



businesses including laundries and shops. Chinese immigrants often lived in small enclaves in Utah's cities and mining towns. Park City's "China Town" consisted of small shacks east of Main Street on what was then called Grant Street, for example. As new immigration from China ended after 1882, people from Japan, Korea, and the Philippines came to work in Utah.

Immigrants from southern and eastern European countries also came to Utah, where they worked for railroad and mining companies, opened businesses, and built communities. These groups often lived in ethnic enclaves in mining towns, as well as in urban areas. Italian Americans settled on the west side of Salt Lake City in what became known as Little Italy. Greek immigrants, recruited in part by the padrone Leonidas Skliris, came after 1900 to work in Carbon County's mining district. By 1920 some 4,000 Greeks lived in central Utah, far outnumbering the entire population of Price.

Immigrant workers created and sustained local and state economies in crucial ways. They paid rent for their homes, grew gardens, sold eggs and produce, and purchased goods and services from local vendors. Immigrants gathered to socialize in coffee shops and other ethnic-owned businesses. They ran local shops, grocery and drug stores, and published newspapers that featured articles about their new and native countries. Immigrants gathered at churches including Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Methodist, Presbyterian, Latter-day Saint, B'Nai Israel, and Jewish synagogues. Many immigrant laborers formed labor unions and participated in political organizations to work for fair labor standards.

African Americans also lived and worked in Utah. Three enslaved African Americans—Green Flake, Oscar Crosby, and Hark Lay—entered the Salt Lake Valley with the vanguard party of white Mormon immigrants in 1847. By 1850, the Utah Territory census listed fifty Black residents with twenty-four free and twenty-six who were enslaved by members of the LDS church. Many of these early Black residents worked to transform the desert landscape into an agricultural community.

In nineteenth-century Utah, African Americans worked for railroads and on cattle ranches, and served in the military. In 1869, African American soldiers of the Ninth Cavalry and the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantry served in Utah. Black soldiers built Fort Duchesne and were commissioned with "containing" Native American resistance to white settlement on their lands. Members of the Ninth Cavalry were also stationed at Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City in June of 1899. African Americans attended different churches, joined fraternal organizations, and ran newspapers, including the *Democratic Headlight*, the *Tri City Oracle*, the *Utah Plain Dealer*, and the *Broad Ax*.

Because of discriminatory practices and racial attitudes, African Americans worked primarily in service jobs and on the railroads, and served in segregated military units. In short, African Americans did not have the same opportunities and freedoms that white citizens did, even in Utah.

Women in every Utah community created the foundations of families, economies, and social networks through their specialized knowledge, labor, political activism, and community work.

Native women cared for children, built and maintained homes, traded, and upheld cultural traditions that continue today. Navajo women tended sheep, carded, spun, and dyed wool, and wove rugs that they often sold to white settlers.



Euro-American and immigrant women built communities, families, and local economies all over Utah. Mormon women engaged in farming and operated businesses, such as the Fifteenth Ward Store and Hall, which sold dry goods, food, cloth, and manufactured goods. Women who lived in Utah’s industrial, mining, and railroad towns managed shops and hotels, ran boarding houses, and grew and sold fruits and vegetables. Italian immigrant Margaret B. Bertolina worked in a hotel owned by her brother in the town of Helper. Bertolina scrubbed floors and made beds each day, which involved carrying heavy buckets and mops up and down the establishment’s stairs. Swedish emigrant Hilda Anderson arrived in Utah in 1866 and began studying obstetrics when she realized that the women of Ibapah Valley needed better midwifery. African American women, such as Jane Manning James, often worked as domestic servants and nannies. Utah’s women aided their communities by working in the fields considered “suitable” for female work including domestic-related service jobs and obstetrics. Regardless of the restrictions and stereotypes they faced, Utah women actively contributed to Utah’s growing economy.

Throughout the nineteenth century, immigrants settled in the territory and contributed their traditions, labor, and their lives to Utah’s culturally and economically diverse landscape. Each group found ways to make Utah their home, even while many groups struggled to secure legal representation or benefit from full equality.

CHANGING RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHICS OF UTAH RESIDENTS, 1860-1890

	1860	1870	1880	1890
SETTLER POPULATION	40,273	86,786	143,963	210,779
MORMONS	92%	92%	79%	66%
OTHER RELIGIOUS/ ETHNIC GROUPS	8%	8%	21%	34%

Derived from U.S. Census. See Dean R. May, *Utah: A People’s History*, p. 116; Thomas Alexander, *Utah: The Right Place*, p. 140.



BARRIERS TO STATEHOOD

The legal path to statehood began in 1848 when leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) developed plans for the massive State of Deseret. This first attempt failed. In part, the application was caught up in national tensions surrounding the expansion of slavery into the West and the balance of power in Congress. In 1850, Utah was admitted as a territory instead of a state. Territorial governors and judges were appointed by the federal government, and territorial residents could not elect representatives to Congress. This lack of local control created ongoing tensions between the LDS church and the federal government. Utah leaders applied for statehood six more times, and did not succeed until the 1890s.

The central barriers to statehood were rooted in national concerns about Mormon cultural, political, and economic practices. The LDS church held theocratic control over local politics, government, and the economy in Utah, which ran counter to pluralistic American political and economic ideals. In addition, church leaders encouraged polygamy as a tenet of religious faith. While polygamy never became universal among church members, outsiders viewed it as a barbaric custom that reduced women to a state of slavery. Many non-LDS citizens and national leaders concluded that these practices made Mormon people deeply un-American.

The power that church members held in local political, social, economic, and religious institutions meant that Utahns who were not LDS—which by 1890 was a sizable minority—did not have equal access to economic opportunities nor a prominent political voice in the territory. Added to this were common negative perceptions of Mormons held by the majority of Protestants in the country. Pointing especially to polygamy and theocracy, reformers and critics classified Mormons as racially different, and believed that they were “incapable of democracy.”¹



One reason Congress denied Utah's repeated applications for statehood after 1850 was widespread distrust in the LDS church's cultural practices, and its political and economic power. Between 1862-1890, Congress passed several laws designed to weaken the church, end polygamy, and "Americanize" Utah Territory. Legislation such as the Morrill Act and Edmunds-Tucker Act hurt the church's economic interests along with its polygamous families.

Mormons were not only at odds with Congress and national reformers, they were at odds with other Utahns. By the 1890s, Utahns were deeply divided along social, cultural, and political lines. Members of the LDS church and their leaders shared a "desire to create a political and economic kingdom of God" that was independent of mainstream American political and economic life.² As Utah's non-LDS population continued to grow, insular communities and separate economies developed around the state. Just as ethnic businesses served immigrant enclaves, Mormons patronized LDS businesses. Political parties followed religious lines, which effectively disenfranchised non-LDS communities.

The territory also lacked institutions that allowed Mormons and non-Mormons to work together to establish schools and other institutions that would benefit all Utahns. For instance, the territorial school system was poorly organized, underfunded, and controlled by a board that "preferred to keep common schools in the hands of the LDS wards."³ This situation led many non-LDS communities to organize their own schools. Without inclusive institutions that would allow people of different faiths to work together, Utahns struggled to achieve the unity they needed to convince Congress that Utah was ready for statehood.

Matters came to a head in 1890, when a proposed federal law threatened to confiscate LDS temples. This led LDS church President Wilford Woodruff to conclude that polygamy must end to protect the church's core religious practices. On October 6, 1890, Woodruff issued a new policy, known as the Manifesto, which formally ended the church's support of polygamy. As the scholar Jean Bickmore White observed, the Manifesto "was the single most important act needed to moderate the national crusade against the Mormons and to move the territory toward statehood."⁴

LDS church leaders recognized the importance of collaborating with railroad and other national business leaders, such as Leland Stanford, who worked with the Republican Party to promote Utah's suitability for statehood and to revise negative stereotypes of Mormon people.

Utah also needed to reform its political organizations. Most Mormons belonged to the People's Party, while non-Mormons typically joined the Liberal Party. However, the platforms of these parties did not align with national political parties. At the urging of Isaac Trumbo, the Mormon People's Party disbanded in 1891, and its members were encouraged to join the Democratic or Republican parties in relatively equal measure. The realignment of Utah's political affiliations with national political parties gave Utahns the political footing they needed to convince Congress that they were ready for statehood.

Finally, in 1895 Congress approved Utah's State Constitution, and Utah was formally admitted as a state on January 4, 1896.

Visit the interactive storymap
**CONTESTED BOUNDARIES:
CREATING UTAH'S STATE LINES**
by Utah Division of State History

UTAH WOMEN'S FIGHT FOR POLITICAL RIGHTS

Many Utah women were active in Utah's political scene during the struggle for statehood. Utah women first gained the right to vote in Utah Territory in 1870, as part of the national fight against polygamy. National suffrage advocates and other reformers expected that Mormon women would vote against plural marriage and undermine polygamy in the territory.

However, members of the LDS church, including women, supported women's suffrage in part to legitimize their religious practices and their own plural marriages. For some LDS women, polygamy allowed them individual autonomy because they often cared for and financially supported their families. Church leaders believed that granting women the right to vote would help to counter negative perceptions of the church by demonstrating that Utah women were not enslaved or demoralized, as many Americans believed.

But when Congress passed the Edmunds-Tucker Act in 1887, Utah women lost their voting rights. The act included several measures designed to weaken the LDS church and end polygamy. It made polygamy a federal crime, which sent scores of Mormon fathers and husbands to prison. Another clause ended women's suffrage in Utah because, contrary to the hopes of national suffrage leaders, Mormon women's votes had both supported polygamy and strengthened the LDS church's political power.

Losing the right to vote was a major setback for Utah women. For seventeen years, they had enjoyed a voice in local and state governments, and women had even been elected to public office. After 1887 Utah women, led by elite Mormon activists including Emmeline B. Wells and Martha Hughes Cannon, campaigned for statehood with the goal of regaining their suffrage and protecting it when Utah finally became a state.

The second campaign for women's suffrage was not limited to Utah's urban areas or to older women who had voted between 1870 and 1887. Many rural white women became politically active in this effort. They organized Women's Suffrage Organization chapters in small towns across the state. These organizations educated rural women about equal pay, constitutional government, and a number of other topics.

African American women in Utah were also politically active in anticipation of statehood. In 1895, the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported on a meeting of Republican African American women, where speakers encouraged African American women to register to vote. They also credited Black women for their pre-Civil War abolitionist efforts and announced that the "Colored Women's Republican Club" would hold weekly meetings on Thursday nights.⁵ For Black women, suffrage was only one part of a larger effort to secure political and economic equality for all African Americans in Utah's Constitution.



UTAH'S CONSTITUTION: A VICTORY FOR SOME BUT NOT ALL

In a major victory for political inclusion, Utah's 1896 State Constitution passed with this clause: "The rights of citizens of the State of Utah to vote and hold office shall not be denied on account of sex. Both male and female citizens of this State shall enjoy equally all civil, political and religious rights and privileges."

This clause expanded political rights to Utah women more than 20 years before the rest of the country ratified the Nineteenth Amendment. It also included African Americans, as well as naturalized citizens who had emigrated from Europe. For its time, Utah's Constitution was radically inclusive. However, it did not extend equal civil, political, and religious rights to those who were not considered citizens. This meant that not all of Utah's diverse peoples were included in the new Constitution. In 1896, Native Americans and immigrants from Asia both fell outside the bounds of political representation in Utah.

Under federal law, people who were born in Asian countries could not become naturalized citizens. For this reason, first-generation Asian immigrants remained "aliens ineligible for citizenship," and did not receive political or voting rights in America or in Utah. In many western states, alien land laws barred these immigrants from owning farmland or other forms of real estate. These discriminatory political and economic laws manifested the negative racial views of Asian people held by many Americans at this time. While Asian communities worked to challenge these beliefs and expand their political rights, anti-Asian discrimination continued through the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, and beyond.



NATIVE AMERICAN SOVEREIGNTY

Nineteenth-century immigration created huge challenges for Utah's Native American communities. Immigrant settlers claimed vital natural resources including water and arable land, which threatened Native American food sources. Nineteenth century settlement led to a time of great change and suffering for Utah's Native peoples. Native American resistance to settler colonialism often resulted in violence, including the Walker and Tintic Wars in the 1850s. But over time, Utah's Native American people learned to adapt creatively to the massive changes wrought by colonization. They would also have to fight for inclusion.

Utah entered the Union at a time when Native Americans were not American citizens. Prior to 1924, Native Americans were categorized as citizens of individual tribal nations, which were outside the American body politic. The federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was responsible for relations with Native nations, including fulfilling treaty agreements and implementing policies to subjugate and assimilate Native people. In Utah as elsewhere, territorial, state, and local governments were not usually involved in matters concerning the tribes.

By the 1890s, the BIA had established remote reservations on federal land for the Ute and Navajo peoples of Utah. Ute people were forced to move from their homelands in prime agricultural areas, including Provo. Paiute, Goshute, and Shoshone people in northern and western Utah had no reservations at this time and continued to live in small communities isolated from white settlements.

The federal government subjected Native American people to a number of assimilation programs, including Indian boarding schools. Generations of Native American children were removed from their homes and families to attend distant boarding schools, including one in Brigham City. The schools' mission was to "Americanize" Native American youth. At school, Native children were forced to cut their hair and wear uniforms. They were often punished for speaking their native languages and engaging in their cultural practices.



In 1896, Utah's State Constitution extended voting rights to all citizens in Utah. However, Native Americans were not citizens and were therefore not included in the polity of the new state. This fact was confirmed by Utah's first State Legislature, which in its first session passed a law defining any Native person living on a federal reservation as a non-citizen of Utah with no voting rights in state and local elections.

Utah's treatment of its Native people was not unusual among the states. Utah was, however, the last state in the union to grant Native Americans the right to vote. The federal government extended U.S. citizenship to Native Americans in 1924, after Native men served honorably in World War I. Yet Utah did not extend voting rights to its Native people until 1957. The state did so only after decades of work by Native American Utahns who pressed for the extension of political rights through the courts.

These hard-won rights are a testament to the resilience and cultural vitality of Utah's Native peoples. Today, Native people live, work and contribute to Utah communities all across our state, including the cities of the Wasatch Front. Goshute and Paiute peoples have gained tribal reservation lands.

Utah is now home to eight sovereign Native nations:

- Confederated Tribes of Goshute
- Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah
- San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe
- Northwestern Band of Shoshone Nation
- Skull Valley Band of Goshute
- Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation
- Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
- White Mesa Community
- Navajo Nation

NOTES

1. W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2015), 7.
2. Jean Bickmore White, "Prelude to Statehood: Coming Together in the 1890s," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (1994): 303.
3. Edward Leo Lyman, *Finally Statehood! Utah's Struggles, 1849-1896* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2019), 172.
4. White, "Prelude to Statehood: Coming Together in the 1890s," 310.
5. "Rally of Colored Women: Enthusiastic Meeting of Second Precinct Voters—Lively Speeches," August 23, 1895, *Salt Lake Tribune* (Accessed October 13, 2020) newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=12940305.

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